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U.S. May Investigate Mengele Case

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

American and Canadian officials moved yesterday to investigate accounts that the Nazi fugitive Josef Mengele may have been captured and released in an American occupation zone after World War II and may have gained entry to Canada around 1962.

In Ottawa, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney directed Justice Minister John Crosbie and Solicitor General Elmer MacKay to conduct an "urgent investigation" of intelligence records, including some that have not been made public. Responding to questions in Parliament, the Prime Minister called the matter of a possible Canadian refuge for Dr. Mengele "repugnant and repulsive in the extreme to our citizenship."

In Washington, Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, said there was agreement within the Reagan Administration that the case should be examined, at least initially, by the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations. In 1983 the office, formed to prosecute war criminals who entered the United States illegally, investigated American intelligence contacts with the former head of the Gestapo in Lyons, Klaus Barbie, now awaiting trial in France.

Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato, Republican of New York, said he was appealing to the Central Intelligence Agency to check postwar intelligence files for the declassification and release of any information on the Mengele case.

Army intelligence documents recently obtained by the Simon Wiesenthal Center under the Freedom of Information Act indicate that Dr. Mengele may have been arrested and released in the American zone of Vienna in 1947 and that he may have sought a Canadian visa from Buenos Aires under a pseudonym in 1962. American intelligence was informed of the visa application, made in the name of "Joseph Menke," and replied to the Canadians with information about Josef Mengele but any subsequent followup has not been revealed.

The Army withheld four pages of Canadian records on the ground of foreign government confidentiality. But they suggest, according to an official familiar with the case, that the man calling himself Mr. Menke actually gained entry to Canada. Whether or not that man was Dr. Mengele, however, remains unclear from the records.

At a news conference in Manhattan yesterday, Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Los Angeles-based Wiesenthal Center for the study of Nazi crimes, called for a full Government investigation. He said that if the records being withheld were not made public, the center would file suit in Federal court to compel their release. Senator D'Amato said that if necessary he would join in the lawsuit.

Dr. Mengele, the chief physician at the Auschwitz death camp, where about four million people, most of them Jews, were gassed and cremated by the Germans, has been sought for arrest by West Germany since 1959. He was last known to be hiding in Paraguay.

Meanwhile, a former inmate of Auschwitz recalled, on the eve of his departure for Poland for a commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the camp, that the Nazi doctor was an enigmatic figure who protected his human "guinea pigs" and showed a bizarre interest in Jewish culture.

The former inmate, Marc Berkowitz, a 52-year-old furniture salesman from New City, N.Y., said he and his 12-year-old twin sister became experimental subjects for Dr. Mengele after their father and brother were executed by the Germans and they and their mother were shipped from Czechoslovakia to Auschwitz in 1944.

He said he still suffered from the spinal injections and experimental surgery performed on him by Dr. Mengele and that the doctor "knew he was doing something terribly wrong."

But at the same time, Mr. Berkowitz said, the doctor "wanted to keep us safe when they wanted to exterminate us."

He said the doctor "liked Jewish mannerisms and attitudes" and delighted in using certain Jewish expressions, even affectionately nicknaming the youth for a Jewish sage.

One day, he recalled, he was in a camp garden picking brussels sprouts for Dr. Mengele's dinner when he noticed a column of women marching through the dust to the gas chamber. Among them, he saw, was his own mother.

"Dr. Mengele saw this and gave me a message to carry so I could follow my mother to the gas chamber."

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